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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1962

Paying Ransom to Castro

THE TRUTH is finally coming out about the deal for ransoming the Cubans taken prisoner at the Bay of Pigs. The "private" arrangements for collecting a multimillion-dollar package of medicines and food are not so private after all.

This is not exactly surprising. The hand of the government had to be involved somewhere in a deal of such intricacy and scope. But now that it is being revealed, the hand looms large indeed.

The medicines and food are "donated" by big U.S. corporations, apparently on some kind of a pro rata basis. Approval of generous tax deductions is promised, and if the inducements to contribute to a good cause are not sufficient, the hand of government is not above doing a bit of arm-twisting to bring compliance.

The American Red Cross is to be the agency for supervising the exchange of prisoners for shiploads of supplies—provided, of course, Fidel Castro doesn't

change his mind again about the whole arrangement. His Communist "paradise" desperately needs the items of barter, but he is a slippery bargainer. What he would like most of all is some public acknowledgment that the ransom is an "indemnity" from the United States government for backing the Cuban exiles in their invasion attempt.

This he is not likely to get. The ransom deal is unsavory as it is, and humiliating enough even when conducted through private channels.

Yet the alternative is to allow the Cuban prisoners to rot in Castro's jails. Humanitarian instincts rebel at permitting such a tragedy when the means of averting it are at hand.

The best thing that can be done now is to complete the transaction with all possible speed and as much dignity as can be salvaged, and write an end to a sorry chapter in our history.